Interview with: Paul Blosser
Interview by: Richard Killblane
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Killblane: Could you tell me about how you got into the Army?

Blosser: I was drafted because of a low number on the draft lottery. I had number 12. At the time, I was at Central Michigan University on a scholarship. When I got such a low number I decided I wanted to get my Army obligation out of the way first and then maybe come back to my college. So I dropped my deferment, got drafted, and went right in the service.

Killblane: How many years of college did you have at that time?

Blosser: I was in my first semester.

Killblane: The first semester. You were on what kind of scholarship?

Blosser: I was on a gymnastics scholarship.

Killblane: What was your MOS [Military Occupation Specialty] and how did you get to Vietnam?

Blosser: My MOS was heavy vehicle operator. I went to Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, for my AIT [Advanced Individual Training], Fort Knox for basic and back over to the AIT. I then had a 30 day leave. Then I went right to Fort Lewis and on to Vietnam.

Killblane: When I say how did you get to Vietnam, do you know why you got selected to go to Vietnam as a draftee?

Blosser: No. It just seemed like everybody was going to Vietnam. It was maybe 10% or less who didn't go to Vietnam at that time out of boot camp. Those who didn't were going AIT. That's all they said, "You guys are going to Vietnam."

Killblane: When did you arrive and where?

Blosser: I arrived in Cam Ranh Bay; it was December 29 or 30, 1970.

Killblane: What was your job?

Blosser: My job was heavy vehicle operator. When I was sent up north to Qui Nhon and processed through to Phu Tai to the 359th Transportation Company, the first thing that happened was the CO [Commanding Officer] grabbed me as a driver, so I ended up driving the CO around. Then, shortly after that, I was picked to go into the orderly because they found out I could type and they needed orderly personnel. The guy from

Chicago was processing out and they needed a replacement, so I started in there as a clerk typing and working in the OR [Orderly Room].

Killblane: You mentioned about how some of the guys were a little jealous about how you got that job driving the CO around.

Blosser: Absolutely. When I first got there and I started driving the CO around, the short timers were all ticked off because it really should have been their job. I only did what I was told to do. I didn't feel blessed or anything. As a matter of fact, I felt the opposite. I felt like I was shorting some people. Anyway, it was good experience because I was always going somewhere, going to all these different LZs for different reasons and it was a real eye-opener.

Killblane: What did you learn out of that?

Blosser: You got to see all the different ways guys lived in the field, how they were at the LZs, and the grunts that were in the search and destroy missions. You'd go out to them and it was really something.

Killblane: Did your CO run convoys?

Blosser: No. He didn't go on convoys. The lieutenants did.

Killblane: Do you know why?

Blosser: No, I don't why. I never really thought about it. I never went on a convoy. I just took the lieutenants or the company commander wherever they needed to be. We'd go to Qui Nhon or headquarters or Qui Nhon hospital.

Killblane: What made you finally decide to get out of that job?

Blosser: I really felt like I wasn't using my experience. I was taught to drive, my father was a truck driver, and I love driving trucks. Here was a 5-ton operator in a petroleum company and I was in the clerk's office. When I was in the orderly room the morning that our convoy was hit in An Khe and "Brutus" was hit so hard, I remember listening on the radio to all the stuff that was going on around us. I remember the lieutenant - I don't remember his name - but I remember him saying "Come on, we're going, we're going!" We went to Qui Nhon hospital to meet the helicopter coming in just off from An Khe and on it were Sergeant Hector Diaz and Chuck Yuzer. I just remember going into the post-op or pre-op and standing back and watching all the chaos of bringing these wounded guys in and flipping them over and cutting their fatigues completely off of them. The nurse with the clipboard was writing down everything, the doctor and nurses were screaming what the wounds were and what was going to be needed, and the guys were screaming too. It was just a very eerie experience.

Also, being in Qui Nhon and seeing the body bags waiting to be placed on planes; it was really hard to take. What really did it for me was a few days later, when we had to prepare for the memorial service for Larry Dahl who was killed, the captain, the CO, handed me the transcript on what he wanted typed and sent to the family. I just remembered after typing that I told myself I'd never type another one.

Killblane: I'm going to get a chance to interview Hector Diaz. What do you remember about him?

Blosser: I didn't know him that well. I didn't know Larry Dahl that well either because I'd only been in-company for probably a month, maybe five weeks. The gun crews were pretty much a close-knit group. I didn't really go in the room very often so I didn't know Larry Dahl that well. Maybe it was to my advantage, I don't know. I didn't know him personally that well, or Chuck Yuzer and Diaz. But to be our company guys and get hit in An Khe and all that - it was tough.

Killblane: What was Hector's job?

Blosser: He wasn't the NCOIC [Noncommissioned Officer in Charge]. I think he was just a gunner on the truck. He may have been in charge that day because I understand that Bond wasn't on the truck that day since he had to take the day off. So, you can imagine how he felt not being on his truck with his crew.

Killblane: Why did Bond have the day off?

Blosser: I forget. He told me when I saw him at a reunion.

Killblane: I heard he had 365 days in 'Nam and was awarded the day off and it just happened to be that day.

Blosser: I bet that was it because I know he left just shortly after that and all the guys that were on that crew naturally were kind of broke up. They broke in a new crew and I ended up on the gun truck “Untouchable.” I got into the group and we became very close in 11 months in '71.

Killblane: I noticed there was a lot of reverence to Dahl. What was it about him and his sacrifice that touched everybody so much?

Blosser: It was the camaraderie that he displayed that I think exemplified being over there and being a company. We were all like brothers. It exemplified what he did and how we felt and how we had to work together each day and be sharp in the morning. When you marshaled up to convoy out, everybody had to be sharp and be ready.

Killblane: When was that ambush?

Blosser: It was February, I don't have the date, but I have the memorial paper in my albums.

Killblane: I have the date. You were in-country five weeks when that took place?

Blosser: Yes.

Killblane: Tell me how you got on the gun truck?

Blosser: I was well liked and had a good rapport with the first sergeant. He really ran the company.

Killblane: What was his name? Do you remember?

Blosser: His name was First Sergeant Willard Self. Great guy and he had a great rapport with Eric Freeman whose name was “Filthy Fred” in-company. I was just in awe of the gun truck crews and the gun trucks. I used to be out there all the time with those guys BS-ing and if there was anything I could do for them in the orderly room I'd help them out. They liked me. I got to talking with Fred and he needed a driver at the time; it just all clicked. I didn't think the first sergeant was going to let me out of the OR, but he did.

Killblane: OR? You mean Orderly Room?

Blosser: Yes.

Killblane: Did you tell Fred anything to convince him to put you on that gun truck?

Blosser: I don't think I did. He was just looking for someone and liked what he saw in me, the way I carried myself, and the shape I was in. And he knew that I didn't drink or anything. I was ready for duty.

Killblane: Was there any train-up? How did he bring you in on the gun truck?

Blosser: He had his way of doing things and being a second tour-guy, this was his dream to be an NCOIC and have his own truck. He hand-picked who he wanted and taught them the way he wanted them to drive. The guy was meticulous and was the best driver I ever saw. Learning from the best would be the best way to put it. I had no other way but to be a good driver.

Killblane: What did it require to be a driver of a gun truck?

Blosser: It was easy in the sense of having Fred’s experience. He could foresee a situation, whether it would be a tanker broke down or whatever. My job was easy because he was there to tell me what to do and it didn't take long. Then we just knew what he wanted and what to do. It fell into place. I just want to use the word “easy.”

Killblane: You mentioned also that he was very selective. How did he pick his crews? And you said he had to get rid of some of the people?

Blosser: He tried guys out and they didn't work. He wanted guys that were always sharp and ready when there was an alert and we had to go on line. He just knew who could be ready and who couldn't. That made me feel good, because when I looked up in the box I always knew he was going to be on my right, up over my shoulder. I just always knew that the guys that were manning their guns were always sharp.

Killblane: When you refer to the box you're talking about the inside of the gun truck?

Blosser: Inside the gun truck.

Killblane: What was a daily routine for a gun truck? What time do you get up? What process did you go through to get ready and marshal and go out the gate?

Blosser: Fortunately for me, I've been reading some letters that had been put away for 31 years that I had written to my wife every other day filling her in on a lot of the light stuff. I would send letters that I would get up at 5:30 and get down there and get the truck and all the weapons ready and get everything loaded, right down to the M79 rounds.

Killblane: What time do you remember getting up?

Blosser: 5:30 a.m. we'd get up and get rolling. As I recall in two of my letters, I'd put the truck away ready to go because we had to be ready for an alert to go on line. We had our place on the perimeter where we had to be. When I put the truck away it was always ready, full of fuel, any flats I took care of when we got back in. It's been so long ago, some things I read about I had forgotten and were coming back to me. The truck had to be ready. Everything had to be ready under the hood. I don't remember all my responsibilities.

Killblane: Where did you park that truck?

Blosser: All the gun trucks were parked in separate, different positions in our compound. When we were 3rd platoon, ours was right out at the end of our room parked right next to basketball court.

Killblane: Why's that?

Blosser: Just to be real close to the crew so we could be on it very quickly.

Killblane: Why did you have to be on that gun truck real quick?

Blosser: Because you never knew. We were always on alert. Through the night if there was any kind of a problem on the perimeter, an alarm would alert us and we

would be out the door and on the truck. We had a position - all the gun trucks had a position on the perimeter - so we all had to be ready.

Killblane: Did you ever get alerted to the perimeter defense?

Blosser: Yeah, we did. I had forgotten a lot of it. I'm starting to read about this and that. Matter of fact, sometime in September there was a South Vietnamese election and they were certain there would be all kinds of trouble and the Communists would try to interrupt the proceedings of a first time election because of democracy. I recall now, reading the letters, we had to go out. One gun truck had to go out and drive the perimeter all night long. We did a midnight duty; I didn't remember it, but reading the letter, it rained all night and the next day we got to sleep in until 3 o'clock and then be ready the next day for our convoy to Pleiku, I believe. It was an on-going thing to be alert, be ready and be sharp.

Killblane: Do you usually go out every day on the gun truck?

Blosser: It was almost every day. In some of my letters I read that we did Pleiku which was a long run, a 200-mile run for us. Because of where we were based, our company would go in all different directions because we hauled petroleum and were the first convoy out. We were needed at all the LZs and Cheo Reo, and LZ English, and LZ Crystal, and LZ Salem, we had An Khe, we had LZ Shuler, we had Pleiku run, and we had Dak To. We were just constantly going. The nice thing was we were going to different areas, but sometimes we would get stuck on a 10-day run to Pleiku.

Killblane: Ten day?

Blosser: Ten day, every day, at Pleiku. That got monotonous because you like to break it up and not be in the same situation all the time. It was various runs.

Killblane: Was there any preparation that you guys had to do in the marshaling area to get ready for your convoy?

Blosser: Most trucks, not every morning, would go up on the test firing range. The gun trucks would go up and ready all their weapons and fire all of them just to make sure everything was ready and no problems. Then we'd throw all the brass off and get the ammo cans filled back up and the gun boxes loaded and everything. Then we'd get back down to the motor pool and while the convoys were all lining up and convoy commanders were getting everything ready, the gun trucks would get ready to fall into position as the convoy was pulling out.

Killblane: Do you remember how you guys got assigned to what convoys?

Blosser: No, I don't. I don't remember how it all came down. We were never able to choose. I'm not real sure the procedure on how that worked.

Killblane: Do you remember if you had a particular place that the “Untouchable” usually ran in the convoy or did it change?

Blosser: No. It always changed. We never had one place we went. It was always different, and that was the nice thing about it: it was never real monotonous.

Killblane: How many gun trucks per convoy? You had three in your company, is that correct?

Blosser: There were more than three in our company. I think there might have been two in our platoon, 3rd platoon. “Creeper,” I think, was another truck that was on the other end of my barracks. I don't remember all the number Misfits; I don't remember all the trucks. Eric Freeman is the guy that has all that information and other guys too. I don't remember how many gun trucks we had but that crew was some of my best friends. I don't remember all the trucks.

Killblane: Who were your crew members?

Blosser: We started off with Robert Logan who was a rear .50 cal gunner. Eric Freeman was the NCOIC and he took care of both mini guns in the middle of the box. And the front gunner, I think, might have been Paul Calvert and there was a Chuck Males that rotated in on us. We stayed together for a long time. Toward the end of my tour those guys left like a month or a month and a half before I did, so we'd lose a guy. I don't remember. In letters I wrote we were training a new driver or we were training a new gunner and I absolutely don't remember who those guys were or what they looked like. I have lost them in my memory.

Killblane: Where's the place of the gun trucks in the convoy?

Blosser: My truck was a maintenance truck so we were always at the rear of the convoy. “Brutus” was usually in the middle. They were “Sugar Bear 1”; we were “Sugar Bear 3.” There was a gun truck usually toward the front near the jeep with the convoy commander. We were always in the rear. When there was a break down or a situation where we have to hold back with a broke down tanker, we'd always have a couple bobtails that would take the load and the other one take the broken down tanker and we get back on the move. When we would be on a break down, Eric Freeman would radio the middle gun truck to move back. We weren't always running with the same gun trucks. They mixed and matched the gun trucks quite a bit. We weren't always with the same ones.

Killblane: What's a maintenance gun truck?

Blosser: We carried a lot of spare tires and had some spare tools for anything that we could maybe do quickly to get the tractor going again like tighten things up or change a tire. We would supply the tire and the driver was responsible to get it changed and a lot of times I jumped down and helped him change it. If not, the bobtail driver would help.

Our job was just to keep the convoy rolling and get it back together and provide security for the vehicle that broke down and get everybody moving, get them back into position, and catch up to the convoy. Then we would radio the gun truck that was taking our place to go ahead and move up as we were pulling into position.

Killblane: So, you actually move around in the convoy?

Blosser: We stayed to the rear, but the other gun trucks do what they're commanded to do as far as having to take up a different position. We always stayed towards the rear, always. We were never in the middle or the front, always in the rear. Always playing catch up, too - always racing to catch back up.

Killblane: What did it feel like going out on a gun truck, especially your first time?

Blosser: Scared to death. I think most days you were apprehensive, real scared, especially when you'd see smoke or catch radio chat that there was something going on and you'd get all psyched up. The adrenaline would flow and you knew that something was going to happen. Sometimes it did and sometimes it didn't.

Killblane: Was there any particular time that you were a little more stressed than others?

Blosser: Yeah, in situations where someone would get hurt, it was real tough. If an RPG would go off next to a driver and we had trouble talking him into get moving again. “Get moving, you got to get moving, you're making us targets, let's get going!” There were certain times where it would get to you. But you'd get flowing again and the adrenaline would ease up a little bit and you’d get it all back together again.

Killblane: On your normal convoy, you're going out the gate, you're leaving Shrang Valley, then you're heading past. The Korean Tigers from there to An Khe Pass; what was it like? Describe the route and how you felt along the way.

Blosser: The first part on the way to An Khe, the first rise of the mountain, was pretty flat. There were a lot of small villages. It was a pretty uneventful ride down through there most days. What I noticed about it was when you entered the An Khe Pass to start up, if there were a lot of lambrettas and busses and all that parked along the side, you knew you were going to get hit.

Killblane: What's a lambretta?

Blosser: A lambretta was a three-wheeled vehicle that they used within the villages to haul all their people and they had a lot of people in the back. It's like a motorcycle with three wheels with a chariot kind of box on the back to carry people or whatever they put in there. They'd put anything and everything in them. If you'd see these Vietnamese vehicles at the bottom of the Pass all sitting along the side you knew that they knew that there was going to be some VC or enemy activity in the area. That gave you a little sign

to be ready and put your flak jackets on because something's going to happen. Everybody would talk it up on the radio to be ready and what we were suspicious of. For us, the nice thing is we always had air cover. We had Hueys and gun ships in the An Khe and in the Mang Yang we always had Loaches [LOH: Light Observation Helicopter] that flew around. I don't remember where they flew out of but there was a Loach that would fly with us, right next to us and around us to draw fire. Then there were always two Cobra gun ships flying real high just waiting for enemy fire draw.

Killblane: Was there any particular places along the An Khe Pass that are more dangerous than others?

Blosser: The whole Pass was pretty hairy. There were some areas that the VC really liked. The Hairpin was a good spot where they could catch us coming up, turning real sharp, and heading the other way.

Killblane: You guys had to slow down to almost a crawl to get past that, right?

Blosser: You had to. The Hairpin is a true hairpin. I've never seen anything like it. You had to crawl right down and the guys all had to downshift and everything to get around that curve and try to build it back up. It was really a spot where the tankers had a tendency to get too close together and bunch up, especially if a guy missed a gear or was having a problem with the next gear. The tankers would bunch up and it would be a real problem. The Hairpin was tough, but there were some areas where there were a lot of cliffs that seemed like they were pretty close to the overhead and I remember looking up, watching, watching, watching. You had a feeling like you were being watched.

Killblane: Where were those?

Blosser: Those were halfway up, quite a few of them on the way up the An Khe. Once you made the Hairpin, it was kind of a straight shoot up the rest of the slope of the mountain, then you turned and you're headed back down.

Killblane: Then you could open up?

Blosser: Then you can finally open up, and you had kind of a downhill as I recall. You had some curves coming down at the little An Khe village and the An Khe military bases up there.

Killblane: As you're doing this route, how do the procedures in the gun truck itself change? I noticed, watching the video, guys are relaxing, especially when you're on the flats and when you're opening up. They can take their flak jackets off, relax, whereas at other places, these guys are alert. What are they doing during this time frame?

Blosser: Everybody can finally unwind a little bit and you just know that you can relax. At the flat land part, you still have to be alert and everything since I was mostly the

driver. But the guys just relaxed up in the box. The flat lands were usually the good spot where we could just kind of relax after the mountain pass coming down and going up. As far as what everybody did . . . you might pop open a Pepsi or some water, straighten some things up in the truck or whatever. Just relax.

Killblane: Anything incidental as far as the route going to Mang Yang Pass and then Pleiku?

Blosser: No, not really. It just seemed like it was two rises from Qui Nhon. From the rice patties you'd climb the An Khe and then you'd run flat for awhile, no curves and hills. Then you'd hit the Mang Yang and again you climb hard again and you get over that and it's the same thing again. Then you were up in the Montagnard area and you would run flat land through these little villages. Not very many though as it was pretty sparse up through there before you got to Pleiku. Then we'd get into Pleiku and the tankers would go offload. We'd go to a checkpoint, and wait for them to return to us. Once we got everybody ready then it was just the return trip.

Killblane: Had Route 19 been black-topped by that time?

Blosser: Yes, for me it was. I talked to Eric Freeman and there were some bridges that were out; it seemed like they were out all the time. There were some bridges where we had to go around them and through a village, then climb the other side and back over. That seemed to be a pretty constant thing in a couple of places where they weren't able to repair the bridges and we had to use a substitute route around.

Killblane: Did you guys have to stop any place like An Khe to hold up and wait to be released?

Blosser: Not very often do I remember us having to stop. More than anything I remember we'd get into a contact and our job was just to get everybody through. We'd be told to cease-fire and move on, get out of the area, they're calling in the artillery, so we'd have to. Once we'd get the convoy through, we also had to get out of there ourselves because they were calling in the artillery.

Killblane: How many convoys a day were running Route 19?

Blosser: I really can't say. We were the first convoy up so I don't know how many were behind us.

Killblane: You were always the first?

Blosser: We were petroleum so we were always the first one up the Pass. I forget how they broke it up. Again, Eric Freeman, being a two-year, second tour guy, was more versed on who came next and the ammo and the reefers, stuff like that. I'm not real sure how many convoys followed us, but we were always the first ones out of the gate.

Killblane: Did you ever have to go anyplace further than Pleiku? Further west?

Blosser: We had to go to Dak To. I had to look at a map again to remember. That was a deal where when we got there they needed one tanker or one gun truck so we'd shoot up there. We'd spread it out; we'd take one time, somebody else took another time. It seems to me that it was 50 or 60 miles from Pleiku.

Killblane: Do you remember how many times you had to make that run to Dak To?

Blosser: No, I don't. I don't think it was a whole lot of times. I'm going to guess and say a half dozen times.

Killblane: What about the runs north and south along Highway One? What were they like?

Blosser: Those were shorter day runs and we'd get back earlier. They were good runs. You got to see the coast - very beautiful. The convoy to Tui Hua was pretty cool. You got to rise up around the Pass and you'd look down into the bay and it was absolutely beautiful.

Killblane: Was there any reaction that was particularly interesting from the Infantry on the other end when you get there, with how you guys did your job?

Blosser: I really can't say for us because we'd get them into the compounds and they would go off and unload their fuel in the bladders and the gun trucks would back into a spot like LZ English. We'd just bullshit and party, just relax and unwind while the trucks were off loading. Then in a short time they'd be back again and get all lined up and we'd fit in and be out the gate and gone again.

Killblane: You said relaxing and partying or unwinding. Could you describe some of the activities some guys were doing?

Blosser: I don't remember throwing footballs around or anything like that. It's hard to say what all we did; just BS-ing and talking about back home and maybe who won the World Series - the weather maybe. And you're always looking for somebody with a new face and you'd find out where the guy was from. It was neat when you'd run across somebody, like at one of the LZs or something, who was from your hometown. You'd be so shocked and it would be cool to talk to him to see what's going on back home and when he got there.

Killblane: What's the stress like, as far as when you arrived? Were you really able to relax when you're getting ready to go back out?

Blosser: I don't really remember. If it was a hairy ride in, it was pretty tense. Then again, for me being a driver, the next thing you know the convoy was heading back. You're down there split-shifting, getting the truck going, watching your distance. You

watch for anything to happen up front, you listen on the radio, you watch your air cover over on the passes. It just all fits in together and it overtakes you and the next thing you know you're back with your company.

Killblane: You guys carried Mermites on there. What did you do for chow?

Blosser: We definitely chow-alized. We had all our C-rations that we'd selectively go through and pass out what we didn't like. What we didn't like, we'd throw to the Montagnard kids who would be out waiting and let them run after and get them. The things in the rations, [like cigarettes], would be traded off for chocolate or pound cake or whatever by the guys who didn't smoke.

Killblane: How many ambushes were you in?

Blosser: I really don't know. As I read through the letters, there were a lot of contacts that I don't remember. I don't remember them and yet they were real. That's the funny thing in talking to the crewmembers: we'd be talking about something and one guy will remember something and you swear it didn't happen. And, at the same time, you'll recall something that happened and they don't. I remember one time where the helicopter wanted to switch gunners for awhile, so we pulled off and they landed on the road. I know the door gunner ran and jumped up on our truck and experienced riding our truck. I know Eric Freeman (Fred) jumped on the helicopter. At our reunion I was telling Eric about it and he said, "I never did that." I said, "Bullshit, you did do that. I've got it on film." I had on a movie so I showed it to him and it just startled me that it was so clear in my mind, not only because I had it on tape, but because I had it on tape and he did not remember it. I said, "Fred, how can you not remember riding in a helicopter?" That's just an example.

Killblane: He was riding in a Cobra wasn't he?

Blosser: No, that was a Huey. That was a scary thing about it, as far as how many conflicts or ambushes you were in. I don't remember. To me it seems like it wasn't many. As I read these letters, it seems like maybe there's more than I remember.

Killblane: Could you describe how they took place?

Blosser: For us, being in the back on the convoy, it wasn't a surprise for us because we had warning it was happening. We'd just kind of fly into the area and move up, move up, move up. We'd get the trucks moving, we'd push somebody - whatever it took to get the convoy, get these guys, moving. We'd get a bobtail to get somebody pulled out or push them out. The main thing was to get the vehicles moving, get them out of there, while we were laying down and firing. I was the driver so all I did was just take orders, or do what I saw needed to be done. I'd reposition the truck. They'd tell me where to reposition to and I'd get the truck jacked around for them.

Killblane: When you hear there was contact, do you drive, leave your position in the convoy and head up to where the action is, or do you wait until the convoy gets up there?

Blosser: What we would do a lot of times that I remember is move up a few trucks. We'd stay in a left hand lane in front of everybody and watch and see where it's coming from, listen on the radio what's going on, just try to keep the convoy flowing, keep it moving, and get the hell through there.

Killblane: The rest of the convoy that's behind the ambush, do they stop or are they still supposed to drive through the ambush?

Blosser: The convoy is pretty spread out so they don't have to stop unless it's a real bad one and they're told to stop. Everything tried to flow and usually we were able to, except for some real bad ones, like the one with "Brutus" where they had to actually go in and recover trucks.

Killblane: So, most of the ambushes just tried to take out single trucks that you were involved in?

Blosser: In the ambush you mean?

Killblane: In the ambushes you were involved in.

Blosser: Yeah, they were just trying to stop trucks; to make them clump up and then give themselves good targets. That's what they were attempting to do - stop the flow of supplies.

Killblane: Can you describe any of the ambushes you were in?

Blosser: No, they're not real clear to me. I really can't describe them other than just adrenaline and being scared to death and the next thing you know it's over and you're through it.

Killblane: You mentioned about the first one you were in - how you were pumping the pedal?

Blosser: That was, in fact, someone else. I was just talking with him. He was on "Matchbox" and we were talking about him...No, it was the "Playboy" driver, and I was talking to him and I remember exactly what he was saying about being so scared: "Man, your legs are bouncing up and down and you're just nervous as heck - all normal."

Killblane: When do you finally get used to that adrenaline rush?

Blosser: You just learned to control it after it happened a couple of times. The next thing you know, you've just learned to control it. But, the first one or two, you just are

out of control and you don't remember until you're back and it's over. Guys are laughing about this or that or about how you reacted and you have to try to laugh it off and then gain control.

Killblane: Basically, when we're so scared that we're not thinking. We act the way we're trained. What was it that prepared you to be able to do your job? Were there training things that you had gone through or is it Fred up in the box that's talking to you and moving you along?

Blosser: It's really a mixture of all. I think it is the NCOIC and his confidence level that really carries you through. You rely on his decisive reaction and you just are certain that his decision is right.

Killblane: You also mentioned about truck breakdowns, without ambushes, and the reaction these drivers had when you showed up. Could you talk about that again?

Blosser: When a truck would break down in the Pass, in most cases, the driver would be pretty scared by the look on his face. You would be pull up, tell him it's going to be all right, get this bobtail that's going to take over and pull him and the other one's going to take his load. The next thing you know, you're back on the move again and everybody's relaxed about it. I know the drivers certainly appreciated it. We were told many times, and still are, that drivers appreciated how we did our job and what our job was all about. We appreciated their professionalism in driving and, like I said, keeping the convoy flowing. And by all means, for our AIT training, we were told distances and how to react. I think the training just spoke for itself.

Killblane: What did you guys do to calm these drivers down?

Blosser: Basically yell at them, get their attention, get them focused back to being the driver again, and not let them get away from the truck or run from the truck.

Killblane: Is that what they're intending to do?

Blosser: Yeah, a lot of guys would jump out of the truck and run away from it. They thought the truck was the target. In fact, if they'd get the truck moving they'd no longer be a target, so that's what we had to try and screen into them – "Get moving, get moving!"

Killblane: Is that everybody's role or is that primarily Fred's role as the NCO?

Blosser: That's mostly his role, because I was the driver and the other guys were gunners. That's his role to control the area, that situation. His job, as far as we were a maintenance gun truck, is to keep things flowing and keep the convoy moving so we could clear the area because there were convoys coming behind us.

Killblane: You'd mentioned about training back in Leonard Wood. How did it differ? You're going through this school training and then you get to Vietnam. Was the training adequate or were there things that were inapplicable and you had to relearn your job?

Blosser: I think it was all applicable. Because of the era I went through, the G.I.s and the instructors just told me, "You're going to Vietnam. Just get it in your head, you're going to Vietnam and this is what you got to do to survive. This is what happens when Charlie tries to take out a couple of trucks in a convoy to bunch you up. This is what you've got to do." You knew what you had to do. But definitely in situations, you'd get real nervous and all it took was someone like an NCOIC to be screaming orders and yelling at you to get you moving. Man, you get back in that truck and you get the truck going and then it all comes right back to you - what you need to do, how your legs work, and how your arms shift the truck and steer it. The next thing you know, you're moving.

Killblane: Once you get back, about what time are you getting in off convoys at night?

Blosser: It all varied. Sometimes we'd get in and it would be getting dark. It depended on the situation of the day. And every day was different; the situations were always different.

Killblane: How many hours of sleep are you getting at night?

Blosser: We definitely got adequate sleep. We'd have sniper fire, mortars go off at night, or if we had to RON [Remain Overnight] in Pleiku, they usually got a lot of artillery activity up there. So, some nights it was quiet, but most nights it was very interrupted sleep. I was glad I wasn't stationed in Pleiku because it was a real noisy base, being an artillery base. At our home base, we had pretty restful nights in most cases.

Killblane: What were the circumstances requiring you to rest overnight at Pleiku?

Blosser: If we had an incident during the day and got slowed down and got in later, the tankers couldn't off load soon enough. If there was a situation where they weren't able to get the trucks all lined up and unloaded, if they didn't get back to the marshal area within a certain hour our convoy was called off from returning, then we'd have to go into Pleiku and actually RON and spend the night and come back the next morning.

Killblane: At that time did they have barracks for you, a place to stay?

Blosser: It seems like they did, but we slept on the trucks. In our company we were buddied up with the MPs [Military Police], so we'd go to their area and they'd put us. So there was always somewhere for the drivers to sleep.

Killblane: How did the Infantry feel about having you there at night?

Blosser: It never really fazed me or I never really thought about it. We just stayed with our group. It's not like we mingled with those guys and BS-ed with them. They'd come

over and we'd talk. Like I said, you'd be always looking for a familiar face. I really don't remember how well we mingled with each other. We stayed in our group.

Killblane: What's the stress level like as far as being able to rest? Let me give you an example. I find that for truck drivers and their experience in Vietnam, especially during this time frame, is very much like bomber pilots in WWII: even though you sleep, you never can rest or relax. What was it like during that period from when you got there to when you left?

Blosser: I really don't remember being fatigued or being real tired because of lack of sleep. I don't recall. It seemed like when you just ran out of adrenaline, you just did your job. I don't recall being so tired that I couldn't make it back to the compound.

Killblane: What were some of the stupid things that drivers did in convoys?

Blosser: There were a number of things they did. They didn't check their tires before they leave and they end up having a flat. Then that takes out the other dual and the next thing you know you've got to pull up with them and you get ticked off. Maybe for some reason, they didn't check their truck and it ran out of fuel, which is crazy. All these stupid things would really tick you off because we hated breakdowns, especially if we thought the driver could have avoided it because there were a number of things they could do. You'd try to make sure they only did that stupid thing once. We would jack them up and hope they never did it again.

Killblane: When they had a breakdown, did the rest of the trucks pass by and you just stood guard over them?

Blosser: Exactly. They allowed the other trucks to pass them and then we come up to find out what the heck the problem was. They'd tell us and we'd try to find out whether the injector pump quit or what in the world happened and do whatever it took to get them going quickly again whether it would be just simply to have a bobtail pull them or another bobtail take their load. It was usually a pretty swift change and we were back on the road again.

Killblane: What's a bobtail?

Blosser: A bobtail is an empty tractor-trailer: a tractor without the trailer. We'd take about four of them on a convoy and that way we had ample backup in case we did have a problem with a tanker or a tractor.

Killblane: What's the average number of vehicles in one of your convoys?

Blosser: I don't remember. Thirteen, fifteen. No more than that, I don't think.

Killblane: Did you just run POL [Petroleum, oil and lubricants] or did you mix POL and cargo?

Blosser: I thought we just did POL, but in fact, some of these letters said that we took some heavy equipment with them one day. I guess we were a petroleum company, but a lot of times we had to escort another type of load somewhere and we'd volunteer for it.

Killblane: What are some of the more interesting aspects of being on a gun truck? What are some of your more memorable experiences?

Blosser: Just the camaraderie is all I remember. It was really neat because you seem to gain a lot of respect. The nice thing, too, is we were able to personalize our trucks, and they certainly stood out. The guys could be real creative with the names they put on the trucks, or the names their trucks earned. It just seemed like drivers were coming up all the time and wanted to take a picture of your truck or you on the truck or they wanted to sit in the seat. It was really kind of an inspirational thing.

Killblane: How did you feel when you finally got orders to go home?

Blosser: In my situation, I just couldn't wait. I felt that I'd done my time and I was so glad. In our case we were able to come off the truck and off the road. I think it was a week or maybe ten days before your leave time that you were able to come off the road and not have to convoy in or out of the company. So, we felt safer that way, and we knew that the reward had finally come and we were able to go home. I remember standing in line to send money home and meeting a guy from Michigan, near my hometown. He had just arrived and I felt so bad for the guy that he was only beginning and here I was going home. It was unbelievable to know that we were finally going to be able to go home.

Killblane: On the gun truck crew, did you get the short timer's attitude where you really began to worry about whether you were going to make it back?

Blosser: Yeah. When your time starts getting short, it seems like you wore the flak jacket even when things were quiet in the Pass. You slip that baby on, you'd have it on you, you're laughing and you'd have one around your legs and the guys are laughing inside the truck. You're cutting up trying to make light of it, but at the same time you're even more scared. It seems like you're even looking harder over the rocks, up the passes, watching and praying that nothing happens.

Killblane: Do you remember what time that takes effect? How short are you before you start thinking about it?

Blosser: A month before you've got to go, it seems like, "Man, I can't believe it. I made it this long. So much has happened and all the what ifs." The hard part was when you'd see something bad happen and you'd just feel sick inside knowing that this guy is not going to make it, he's not going home, it could have been you, why wasn't it you, why did you make it? It was really eerie.

Killblane: You're describing the survivor's guilt that almost everybody experiences?

Blosser: Absolutely.

Killblane: Did you run gun trucks all the way up until it was time to go?

Blosser: I'm still reading letters that I had sent home which basically told my then-girlfriend, now wife, how many days I had left, that I was still on the road, and that I wanted to believe it was a week or eight days before I finally came off the truck. It was really hard to leave the crew. That's why, in the middle of your tour, when you're allowed your R&R, a lot of the guys just wouldn't leave because they didn't want to break up the crew and have somebody else come in. In cases where it did happen and a bad thing happened on the truck, there was a sickening feeling.

Killblane: Did you take your R&R?

Blosser: No, I did not.

Killblane: Most of your guys, your crew, were already rotating out, so you were one of the last people there.

Blosser: Except for the NCOIC. He stayed.

Killblane: He was there before you and ...

Blosser: Eric Freeman stayed a year and a half on the second tour, yes.

Killblane: So, you really felt guilty about leaving him?

Blosser: It was bittersweet. I was ready to go, but at the same time, it was hard to leave and know somebody was going to take your place and know what might happen, especially early when they're not experienced. But you had to put that behind you and move on and make a place for the new person. Fortunately for me, things were winding down when I left. We heard it coming that they were going to start pulling out and that guys were not going to be replaced.

Killblane: What did you do when you got back? You still had a year left in the Army or about a half year left, right?

Blosser: I did, but I got an early-out. Those were happening at that time, too, because of this pull-out from Vietnam, winding down the war because of the protesting, and the pressure. Nixon was being thrown out of office. When I got home it was a bad time, an ugly time. It was a time where you were told at Fort Lewis, Washington, not to wear your uniform on the plane, to go civilian because you'd be targeted. It was an ugly time for Vietnam veterans and for the country. Vietnam was an ugly word.

It's so ironic that veterans laid low for 10, 15, 20 years because of the negativism of the war which we were involved in, which our whole county and every family was

involved in. It was on the news constantly. It was really something to hide and keep under wraps and not talk about. It's so ironic because shortly after that it was something that wouldn't go away. Everybody talked about it, books were written about it, movies were made about it and they are still being done. I don't know what the aura is about the Vietnam War, but hopefully it's all been put to a good reason.

Killblane: How were you received when you got home? These small towns tended to have a completely different attitude about the war.

Blosser: Again, my real close friends thought it was an honorable thing. To be out, to go to a show or anything like that, you wouldn't wear anything that said 'Vietnam Veteran' on it. You just suppressed it. But then later, when everyone else seemed to be accepting it and sensationalizing it, you still kind of laid low with a bitter taste in your mouth. Again, like I said, it seems that maybe it taught our country a lesson. I ended up having one son and I said that my son would never go to a 'Vietnam'. For our country, it was an ugly time. I look back and the guys that I saw lose their lives and the guys I didn't see lose their lives, the biggest question I can ask is “why?”

Killblane: When did you start getting in touch with members of your crew?

Blosser: It wasn't until four years ago that they actually started talking about a reunion. I definitely talked to the NCOIC, Eric Freeman. Then there was another guy on “Brutus” that I remained friends with and I would see him every five years. Every eight years I would see Lanceburger off “Brutus.” We stayed in contact for at least two years. Then there was Robby Robinson from the “Brutus” gun truck in '71. I would talk to him on occasion. There are some guys still missing that we would like to talk to but we are having a little trouble finding them. We did have a reunion about four or five years ago and I was a little apprehensive about going to it - scared about what might be talked about. But the good thing is, veterans are able to bury the bad memories and talk about the good ones. That's the cool part. The scary part is when you think about it and you're apprehensive about the meeting initially. Right now, after my reunion in Illinois with the 359th Transportation Company gun truck crews, it's something that we can talk about and talk about the good things.

Killblane: Is there anything else you would like to add for the sake of history on your experience in Vietnam?

Blosser: There's probably a whole bunch of things, but right now, no, I don't think so. I think that after this show there will be some other things that will come to the forefront that I might want to share with you. This is going to be a great experience.

Killblane: Thanks a lot.